

**Annunciation Orthodox School
AOS Dads Club
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**Remarks
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“The Partnership: Our Role in Houston’s Future”

There’s a proverb that says, Any man can be a father, but it takes a special person to be a dad. It’s a privilege to be among so many special people here today. I greatly admire what you do for your children and for this school, and I think the community is a better place for your involvement.

Speaking of “better places,” I’m fortunate to work with an organization whose job is to promote what is undeniably one of the better places to live and work in this country. I know you all want what’s best for your kids. I do, too. And I have to tell you, I can’t think of a region that is more equipped to help them fulfill their potential and realize their dreams than we are in Houston.

Too often, there’s a tendency to take the city where you live for granted. It’s not intentional. It’s not as if you would rather be somewhere else. It’s more a question of familiarity – we know the big things, the most obvious things, because that’s what we hear about so often.

Consider that for a second. Mention Houston, and what comes to mind first?

Fourth-largest city in the country. Johnson Space Center. Energy capital of the world. Texas Medical Center. And don’t get me wrong – all of those are important. They are central to who and what we are as a region.

But to a lot of other people, Houston is much more than that. Listen to what they’re saying:

- *Fortune* magazine has rated us the nation’s No. 1 region for fastest-growing companies.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, we’re No. 1 in job growth.
- *Forbes* says we’re the third-best metropolitan area for business and careers.
- We have 23 Fortune 500 companies with headquarters here – the fourth-highest in the country – and 13 of Fortune’s 100 fastest-growing companies are headquartered in the region.
- *Expansion Management* puts us at No. 5 for best business opportunities.
- *Site Selection* ranks us No. 7 for new and expanded facilities.

- We're one of the Top 10 fastest-growing metro areas for women-owned businesses.

I could go on – and believe me, that is only a *partial* list – but I think the point is clear: Mention Houston to people who know business, and they're going to tell you this region is, truly, the land of opportunity.

There are a lot of reasons for that. Some are concrete, backed up by facts and figures that have put us in all those Top 10 lists. Others, while more abstract, are just as important as any set of numbers you'll ever find on any survey.

Let me first take a moment to talk about some of the tangibles – some of which may fall into the "I didn't know that" category:

- Our cost of doing business is 11 percent lower than the national average and far below that of any area with more than 3 million people, according to *Forbes*. That means new companies can become profitable faster, and existing companies can better build upon their financial performance.
- We have the lowest cost of living and least-expensive housing among the nation's 24 metropolitan regions with populations of 2 million or more.
- We have 83 foreign consulates, which ranks us No. 3 nationally and gives us global visibility.
- 23 Fortune 500 companies have headquarters in the region – the fourth-highest in the country – and 13 of Fortune's 100 fastest-growing companies are headquartered here.
- Our transportation infrastructure is among the best in the world. Bush Intercontinental is the 11th-largest international air cargo gateway in the United States, and the Port of Houston routinely ranks first in the nation in volume of foreign tonnage and second in total tonnage.

Regarding the intangibles, I think it comes down to one phrase: "can-do attitude." Our people, our leaders, our businesses – everyone believes that anything is possible. When we want something to happen, we make it happen. When opportunity knocks, we don't ask who's there, we just answer the door.

But that kind of spirit is in our blood. Let's not forget that back in the 1840's, the area's business leaders came up with the strange idea to turn Houston – 53 miles inland – into a port city. Clearly, "impossibility" is not part of our collective vocabulary.

Now, some people might look at these achievements and assets and say, "Well, we have arrived." But I have to tell you something: While they say there may be room at the top...there's no room to sit down. And the Partnership has taken the lead in ensuring we don't rest on our considerable laurels as we approach the future.

In 2005, we created a 10-year strategic plan that will keep us on a path that encourages growth, expands opportunity, and enhances our lifestyle. It's big, bold, and ambitious, and is designed to stir the lifeblood of our economy – job creation, capital investment, business

prosperity, and international trade.

To begin with, it sets some clear targets for the coming years: 600,000 net new jobs, \$60 billion in new capital investment, and \$120 billion in new foreign trade.

It also identifies multiple industry clusters that will be the focus of our efforts to achieve those targets:

- Aerospace and aviation;
- Medical and biotechnology;
- Energy and petrochemical;
- Information technology; and
- Nanotechnology.

We believe strongly that the sustained development of these sectors will bring new jobs, establish new areas of economic leadership, and attract new talent. This will enable us to capitalize on our core strengths and resources, and drive prosperity throughout the region.

The plan also commits us to taking a proactive, substantive role in the public policy process.

I'm not talking about just being "a" voice on issues that affect business and the economy. I'm talking about being "the" voice – *the* leading advocate for legislation, initiatives, and programs that foster economic growth and position our business community as a national and global leader.

Of course, leadership is about translating vision into results. Anybody can take a position. Leaders take action. And our actions are already beginning to speak loudly about the Partnership's commitment to meeting our strategic goals.

Let's talk about employment first.

In the 12 months that ended in September, we had the highest rate of job growth among the country's dozen largest metropolitan areas. It was more than twice the national rate; four times higher than Los Angeles; three times higher than New York and Chicago; and more than twice as high as Boston.

So we're doing what we said we'd do. In fact, over the past two years we're actually ahead of our target.

We're seeing the same kind of results on the policy side. When Gov. Perry and the Sharp Commission laid out their plan to fix a broken tax code, the Partnership was the first large chamber in the state to back it – and the proposal's most vocal advocate.

It paid off, too. The plan overhauled the school finance system, cut taxes, and raised teacher salaries. It's expected to create 50,000 jobs, increase personal income by \$2 billion, and boost retail spending by \$1.6 billion.

In other words, we led an effort that resulted in a package that was good for business, good for students, and good for taxpayers. We showed that a group of thoughtful, dedicated business people with the courage to pursue change can have a positive impact on the region

– and on the entire state.

Our plan isn't just about making this a better place to work, though. It's also about making it a better place to live. And it commits us to pursuing "quality of place" initiatives that ensure Greater Houston has the building blocks that help us attract jobs and investment...and enjoy life to the fullest.

I spoke a moment ago about our advocacy role in education. We're going to apply that same urgency and sense of purpose to lifestyle issues, too – issues like regional mobility, air quality, transportation, green space, and health care.

Just as we have an obligation to shape a climate for growth that fosters opportunities for business, we also have an obligation to shape a climate for living that fosters opportunities for families. As parents, you want your children to be successful, certainly. But you also want them to be able to grow in a community whose hallmarks include cleaner air, more recreation and cultural options, and less congestion on the highways.

We want that, too. With this strategy, we'll get it.

While I'm on the subject of quality of life, I hope you will forgive a brief digression. But I want to add a couple more facts that describe the Greater Houston you might not know:

- The Trust for Public Land rates us No. 3 in the country for green space and No. 4 for total land devoted to parks.
- We're ranked second in the nation for the number of theatre seats in a concentrated downtown area.
- And if that's not enough, Triple-A has named us the most pet-friendly city for travelers.

So whether you've got two legs or four, whether you want to work or play, whether you want to start a business or grow a business – this is the place to be.

When you look at what we've achieved to date – job growth, our work on behalf of the Sharp Commission plan – I think we've made some real progress. But let's not forget that we're barely two years into the plan. Scoring a touchdown in the first quarter does not guarantee you'll be ahead when the game is over.

Still, I believe we are well-positioned to come out on top in the long run. Because in addition to having a strategy for the future, we have a program to support it.

Last year, we launched an effort called Opportunity Houston. It's a \$40 million fund-raising initiative designed to generate leads, create jobs, and help spread the word – nationally and internationally – about everything this region has to offer. Led by Astros' owner Drayton McLane, it has already passed the \$28 million mark.

I can't overstate the importance of this effort – both to the region and to our business community.

The economic development marketplace is tough. We are being challenged by other

countries, regions, states, and metro areas that are offering hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks as an incentive to attract investment. Some are even giving companies a blank check – literally – to locate in their areas.

On top of that, regions that have emerged as our primary competitors are becoming more and more aggressive.

- Phoenix, for example, has a strategy that focuses on aerospace, bioscience, and technology companies – all of which are clusters identified in our strategic plan.
- Miami-Dade County is positioning itself as a “Global Gateway.” Already, 60 percent of all U.S. trade with Central America flows through Miami, as does 46 percent of Caribbean trade and 27 percent of South American trade.
- And in Canada, Edmonton, Alberta, is the self-described “world hub” for the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries; and the Atlantic Canada region proclaims itself as a “world leader” in the energy sector.

That is just a glimpse of what we’re up against. And the key to success in that marketplace is not simply having the “will to win.” We have that. The key is being “prepared to win.”

With this strategic plan, supported by Opportunity Houston, we are. We will be one of America’s Top 4 locations for business growth, capital investment, and job creation.

I’ve thrown out a lot of facts and figures this morning, and discussed in some detail how the Partnership hopes to shape the region’s future. And I think that brings us to one final question:

What can you as fathers do – individually or with your children – to take an active role in this process?

Obviously, we have a number of opportunities available for Partnership members. They include committees on everything from quality of life, to health care, to education and workforce, to green buildings. I can say without qualification that those who serve on these committees are having an impact on where we are today – and where we’ll be tomorrow.

But the options for serving and contributing don’t stop there.

You can volunteer – either with a charity of your choice, or through organizations like Harris County Citizens Corps or websites like volunteermatch.com or volunteerhouston.org.

You can go to a play, or to the museum, or to the opera – activities that strengthen an arts community that is one of our greatest cultural assets.

Or you can just spend a leisurely afternoon at one of our parks – and remind yourself of just how good the good life can be here.

But no matter what you do, I hope you’ll tell everyone about the experience – friends...neighbors...business associates...people you meet on airplanes. I hope that you will speak proudly about those statistics I mentioned earlier, and passionately about the

community they reflect. By spreading the word about all that is great about Greater Houston, you'll be an ambassador for the region and an architect of the future.

I feel great about that future, too. We're fortunate to live in a place that encourages us to dream, and to dream big – and then provides us the resources to achieve, and to achieve greatly. And that's why as good as things have been in the past, and as good as they are now, I am convinced the best really is yet to come.

Thank you.